

# State Profile

## History

People have lived in West Virginia as far back as 12,500 years ago, beginning with the Paleo-Indians. The Fort Ancient Indians inhabited the area until 300 years ago when they were driven out by the Iroquois Indians from New York and the great Lakes area. When the first European settlers arrived, all the native American villages were gone, and the area was a hunting ground used by many tribes including the Cherokee, Shawnee, and Iroquois.

The first permanent European settlement dates from 1731 when Morgan Morgan founded Mill Creek. In 1742, coal was discovered on the Coal River, an event that would be of great significance in determining West Virginia's future.

West Virginia shares its history with Virginia from 1609 to 1861 until Virginia seceded from the Union in 1861. Then the delegates of 40 western counties formed their own government, which was granted statehood in 1863. Declared a state by President Abraham Lincoln, West Virginia is the only state to be designated by Presidential Proclamation.

## Capital City

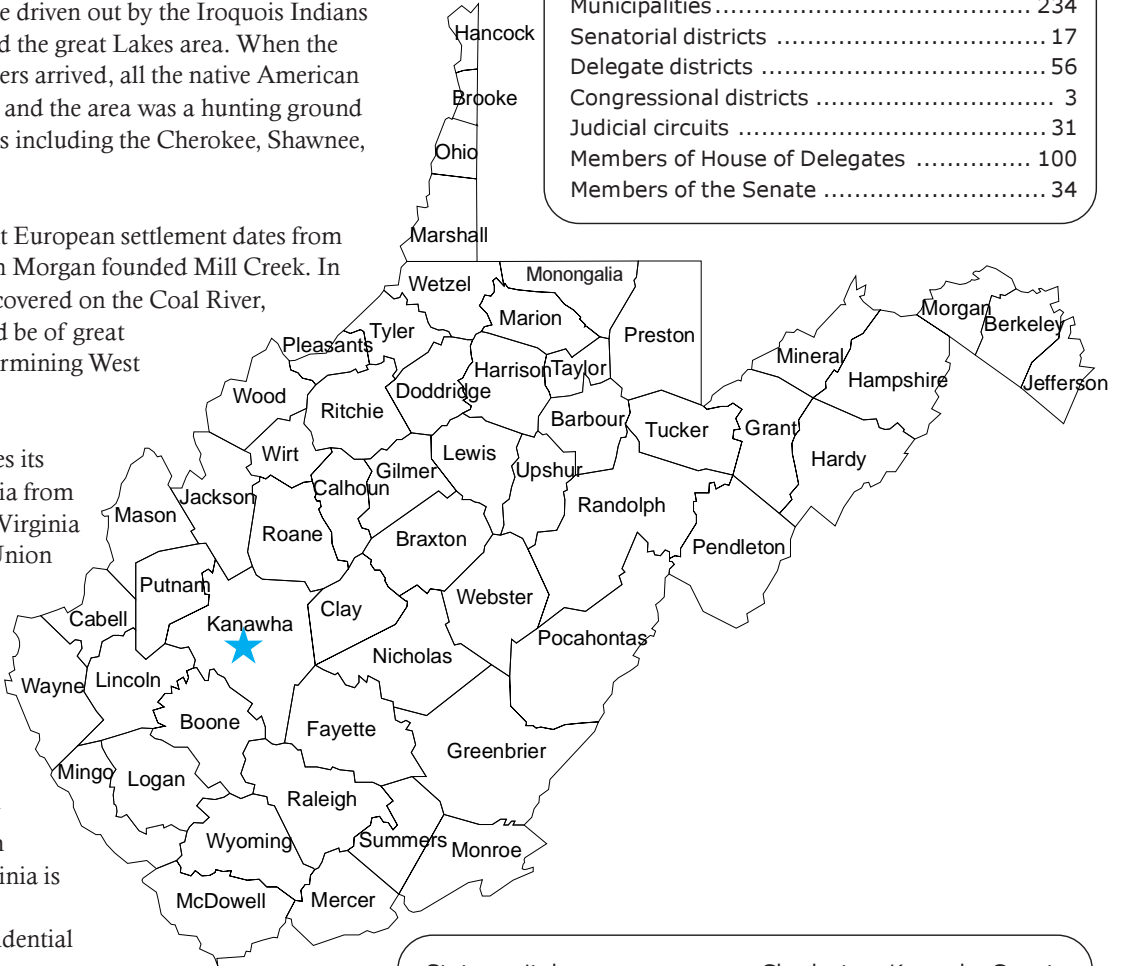
When West Virginia became a state in 1863, the capital was located in Wheeling.

The State Legislature designated Charleston as the capital city in 1870. Kanawha county citizens provided a passenger boat to move all state records to their new home in Charleston.

In 1875, the Legislature voted to return the capital to Wheeling. Although state officials boarded steamers on May 21 to journey to Wheeling, State archives and records did not arrive until late September, causing state government to be at a standstill for four months.

## Geographical Data

Area (square miles) land and water .....	24,231.4
Counties .....	55
Municipalities .....	234
Senatorial districts .....	17
Delegate districts .....	56
Congressional districts .....	3
Judicial circuits .....	31
Members of House of Delegates .....	100
Members of the Senate .....	34



State capital .....	Charleston, Kanawha County
Youngest county in state .....	Mingo (1895)
Oldest county .....	Hampshire (1754)
Smallest county .....	Hancock (area 88.2 sq. mi.)
Largest county .....	Randolph (area 1,040 sq. mi.)
Highest point in state .....	Spruce Knob (4,861 ft.)
Lowest point in state .....	Harpers Ferry (247 ft.)
Geographical center of state ....	near Sutton, Braxton County
Center of population .....	near Gassaway, Braxton County

## *State Profile*

In 1877, the Legislature decided that the citizens would choose between Charleston, Martinsburg, and Clarksburg for a permanent capital location. As a result, it was proclaimed that eight years hence, Charleston would be the government's permanent seat, and State officials again boarded a boat to move from Wheeling to Charleston, towing a barge containing the State records, papers, and library.

### **Capitol Building**

The new capitol opened in May 1885 and served until its destruction by fire on January 3, 1921. For the next six years West Virginia state government was run from a "pasteboard capitol," a temporary structure built hastily in the wake of the fire. Although this structure was also destroyed by fire in 1927, the present capitol was already under construction on the north bank of the Kanawha River.

This new building, designed by Cass Gilbert, was completed in 1932 at a cost of \$10 million. In 1912, Gilbert had designed the world's first skyscraper, the Woolworth Building in New York City. His other works include the state capitols of Arkansas and Minnesota, and the U. S. Supreme Court Building and the U. S. Treasury Building in Washington, D. C.

The exterior of the capitol, built in the classical style, is of buff Indiana limestone. The magnificent 293 foot gold dome that tops the structure is five feet higher than the dome of the U. S. Capitol. The entire dome is gilded in 14 karat gold leaf applied to the copper and lead roof in tiny 3 3/8 inch squares. Two-thirds of the capitol interior is made of four different kinds of marble. The rotunda section and two wings provides 535,000 square feet of floor space and houses 333 rooms.

### **Economic Base**

The state ranks second in the nation in coal production, producing 15% of the U.S. total. Annual coal production was 163,896,890 tons in 2002. West Virginia also is a leader in the chemical, steel, aluminum, natural gas, oil, and hardwood lumber industries. The state's diverse economic base also includes the energy, plastics, transportation equipment, biomedical technology, and distribution industries.

According to a 2000 inventory conducted by the U.S. Forest Service, West Virginia remains 78% forested, even though the timber harvest has doubled since the last inventory. Species of oak comprise 48% of harvested wood. With 12 million acres, West Virginia is the third most heavily forested state in the nation. Eighty-seven percent of West Virginia's forested land is privately owned, and the remaining 13 percent is publicly held, including national forests; state, county, and municipal governments; and other miscellaneous federal agencies.

West Virginia is one of the largest producers of oil and natural gas east of the Mississippi River. It has produced significant amounts of natural gas in the Appalachian Basin. Production in 2002 was 198,000 million cubic feet of natural gas and 1.4 million barrels of oil.

West Virginia has 20,500 family farms generating approximately \$400 million in annual commodity sales. Major agricultural commodities include poultry, cattle, dairy products, hay, and apples. The West Virginia Grown program continues to expand with an annual impact of \$100 million from value-added products that use renewable resources to directly reach consumers.

A West Virginia visitor study, commissioned by the Division of Tourism and released in 2003, revealed that the number of visitors in 2002 increased 8.5% to 23.9 million, staying an average of 3.26 days. Direct spending by tourists in 2002 was \$3.5 billion, up from \$3.1 billion in 2001. Tourism had an economic impact of \$4.86 billion in 2001, an increase of nearly 25 percent since 1999, the last year the Division of Tourism completed an economic impact study.

## State Profile

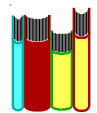
### Services



In 2002, there were 241 law enforcement agencies in West Virginia—one of those agencies was the State Police with 62 detachments, and another was the Division of Natural Resources with 55 detachments. There were 3,043 full-time sworn law enforcement officers—2,951 men and 92 women—an average of 1.7 officers for each 1,000 inhabitants of the state.



West Virginia has 445 fire departments—416 of these are volunteer fire departments, 12 are paid, and 17 are a combination of paid and volunteer. There are a total of 11,147 fire fighters—870 paid and 10,277 volunteers.



West Virginia's 176 public libraries—97 central libraries and 79 branches—contain nearly five million books. All of the libraries have public Internet access with an average of 20,558 weekly electronic resource users. The total number of borrowers is 1,080,455, with a total circulation of 7,606,763. State grants to public libraries is \$4.06 per capita.



West Virginia has 774 public schools, 24,288 professional personnel, and 13,502 school service personnel within 55 county school systems. More than 62% of the teaching force has a master's degree or higher. One hundred fifty-one West Virginia teachers have also earned National Board Certification, the highest credential for teachers.



There are 3,500 practicing physicians in West Virginia, as well as 23,000 active registered nurses, 73 hospitals and medical centers, and 36 primary care organizations with 81 clinic sites and 46 school-based health centers. DHHR has 54 county offices where residents can access services..



Of the 39,011 miles of public roads in West Virginia, 35,960 miles are on the state highway system, along with 6,543 bridges, of which 4,460 are 100 feet or less in length. West Virginia has four nationally designated scenic byways: the Coal Heritage Trail, the Highland Scenic Highway, Washington Heritage Trail, and the Midland Trail, as well as one All American Road (the National Road following US 40 from the Ohio state line across Ohio County to the Pennsylvania line.



West Virginia's division of Public Transit oversees 17 transit systems that employ 472 full-time and 88 part-time workers. The buses traveled 9,448,252 miles and carried a total of 4,526,185 passengers of which 942,367 were elderly or disabled.



There are 32 airports in the state, but only nine of them are commercial airports. Currently, Jackson County Maritime Center is the only public port in West Virginia. Six public river ports are in the planning process—they will be located in Buffalo, Huntington, Martinsburg, Parkersburg, South Charleston, and Weirton.



Route miles of railroad operated within West Virginia totaled 2,427 miles at the end of 2000—183.4 miles were owned by the State. Trains hauled 2,765,813 carloads of freight, a total of 227,014,313 tons. Of all freight originated in the state and hauled by rail, 95% was coal.

## State Profile

# Miscellaneous

The biggest threat to West Virginia's forests is fire. In a ten-year period from 1986 to 1995, forest fires burned a yearly average of 97,470 acres. The damage during that ten-year period, including damage to homes, structures, and other land, has been computed to be \$21,630,577.



The third-largest diamond ever found in the United States, the "Punch" Jones Diamond, was found near Peterstown, in Monroe County within one-half mile of the Virginia state line. It has been suggested that the diamond actually occurred in rocks in Virginia and that erosion carried it to the West Virginia side of the state line. There are no other likely sites for diamonds in this state.

No other precious gems are known to have been found in West Virginia. Among the few gemstones found in West Virginia are some opal, some types of quartz, and two coal or coal-like minerals which, though softer than most gemstones, are cut, polished, and carved into jewelry.

A variety of the yellow apple, the Golden Delicious, originated in Clay County. The original Grimes Golden Apple Tree was discovered in 1775 near Wellsburg.

The first steamboat was launched by James Rumsey in the Potomac River at New Mecklenburg (Shepherdstown) on December 3, 1787.

On February 14, 1824, at Harpers Ferry, John S. Gallaher published the "Ladies Garland," one of the first papers in the nation devoted mainly to the interests of women.

One of the first suspension bridges in the world was completed in Wheeling in November 1849.

Bailey Brown, the first Union soldier killed in the Civil War, died on May 22, 1861, at Fetterman, Taylor County.

A naval battle was fought in West Virginia waters during the Civil War. United States Navy armored steamers were actively engaged in the Battle of Buffington Island near Ravenswood on July 19, 1863.



Mother's Day was first observed at Andrews Church in Grafton on May 10, 1908.

The first rural free mail delivery began in Charles Town, October 6, 1896, then spread across the United States.

Outdoor advertising had its origin in Wheeling about 1908 when the Block Brothers Tobacco Company painted bridges and barns with the wording: "Treat Yourself to the Best, Chew Mail Pouch."

West Virginia was the first state to have a sales tax. It became effective July 1, 1921.

Mrs. Minnie Buckingham Harper, a member of the House of Delegates by appointment in 1928, was the first African American woman to become a member of a legislative body in the United States.

West Virginia's Memorial Tunnel was the first in the nation to be monitored by television. It opened November 8, 1954.

West Virginia was the first state to use new technology to "measure" and store electronically the face and fingertip images of licensed drivers. Because this recorded information is unique to each individual, these images can prevent stolen identity should a driver's license be lost or taken.

The longest steel arch bridge (1,700 feet) in the world is the New River Gorge Bridge in Fayette County.

Organ Cave, near Ronceverte, is the third largest cave in the United States and the largest in the state.

West Virginia has an mean altitude of 1,500 feet, giving it the highest average altitude east of the Mississippi.

## State Profile

# State Symbols

### State Flag

The state flag was officially adopted by the Legislature on March 7, 1929, by Senate Joint Resolution 18.

Prominently displayed on the pure white field of today's flag and emblazoned in proper colors is a coat of arms, the lower half of which is wreathed by rhododendron, the State Flower. Across the top, lettered on a ribbon, is the constitutional designation "State of West Virginia." The white field is bordered on four sides by a strip of blue, and, for parade purposes, all but the staff side are to be trimmed with gold fringe.



### Great Seal of West Virginia



The great seal of West Virginia, which also is the coat of arms, was adopted by the Legislature on September 26, 1863, and symbolizes the principal pursuits and resources of West Virginia. Described briefly, the obverse side of the seal bears the legend "State of West Virginia," together with the motto, "Montani Semper Liberi" (Mountaineers Are Always Free); a farmer stands to the left and a miner to the right of a large ivy-draped rock bearing the date of the state's admission to the Union. In front of the rock are two hunters' rifles upon which rests a Phrygian cap or "cap of liberty."

Joseph H. Diss Debar, of Doddridge county, designed the state seal in 1863 at the request of the first West Virginia Legislature.

### Official Colors

Old gold and blue were designated as official State Colors by Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 20, adopted by the Legislature on March 8, 1963.

### Official Day

On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln approved the Statehood Bill for West Virginia on the condition that it would gradually abolish slavery. West Virginia was proclaimed a state on April 20, 1863, with the bill becoming effective sixty days later on June 20, 1863. "West Virginia Day" became a legal holiday by Chapter 59, Acts of the Legislature, Regular Session, 1927.

### State Songs

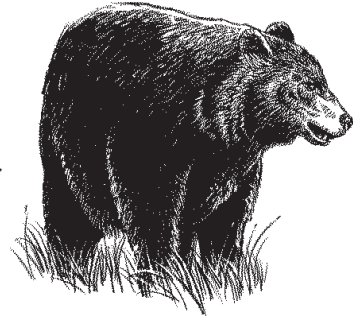
"The West Virginia Hills," "This Is My West Virginia," and "West Virginia, My Home Sweet Home" were designated as the official State Songs of West Virginia, each ranking equally with the others in official status, by House Concurrent Resolution No. 19, adopted by the Legislature on February 28, 1963.



## State Symbols

### State Animal

The black bear (*Euractos Americanus*) was selected as the official state animal of West Virginia by a poll of students, teachers, and sportsmen conducted by the Department of Natural Resources in 1954-55 and officially adopted by the Legislature in 1973 by House Concurrent Resolution No. 6. It is the only species of bear found in the state. While commonly referred to as the “black bear,” its coloring is actually deeply tinted with brown. Its habitat in West Virginia is primarily in the eastern mountain region. A litter usually consists of one or two cubs, rarely three, each weighing about eight ounces at birth. The adult reaches an average maximum weight of 250 pounds.



### State Bird

The cardinal (*Richmondena Cardinalis*) was made West Virginia's official bird by House Concurrent Resolution No. 12, adopted by the Legislature on March 7, 1949, authorizing a vote by pupils of public schools and civic organizations. The male of the species is a rich scarlet with a mask and shading of black, while the young birds and females are a less brilliant color. The adult bird measures approximately eight inches long. It ranges from New York State to the Gulf of Mexico and as far west as Oklahoma.



### State Butterfly

The monarch butterfly was declared the official butterfly of West Virginia by Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 11, adopted by the Legislature on March 1, 1995.



### State Fish

The brook trout was designated the state fish by House Concurrent Resolution No. 6, adopted in 1973 following a poll of sportsmen who favored the brook trout. The brook trout is a native West Virginia species.

### State Flower

The *Rhododendron Maximum* of “Big Laurel” was made the official state flower of West Virginia by House Joint Resolution No. 19, adopted by the Legislature on January 29, 1903, following a recommendation by the governor and a vote by the pupils of public schools. It is a shrub of the heath family and may be recognized by its large evergreen leaves and delicate pale pink or white bloom, mottled with either red or yellow flecks.



## State Symbols



### State Fruit

The Golden Delicious apple was designated as the official state fruit by Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 7, adopted by the Legislature on February 20, 1995. This apple variety was discovered by Anderson Mullins in Clay County, West Virginia, in 1905. The plain apple had been previously designated as the official state fruit by House Concurrent Resolution No. 56, adopted March 7, 1972.

### State Gem

The state gem, so designated by House Concurrent Resolution No. 39, March 10, 1990, is technically not a gemstone, but rather the silicified Mississippian fossil coral *Lithostrotionella*, preserved as the siliceous mineral chalcedony. It is found in the Hillsdale Limestone in portions of Greenbrier and Pocahontas counties and is often cut and polished for jewelry and for display.

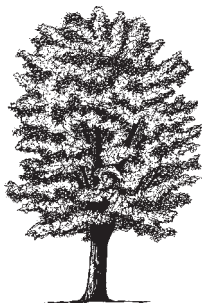
### State Insect

The honeybee became West Virginia's official state insect in 2002 by the Legislature's Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 9. In addition to its flavorful honey, the honeybee pollinates many of the state's most important crops including fruits, vegetables and grasses. Its activity produces more benefit to the state's economy than any other insect. The honeybee has six legs, four wings and its coloring ranges from dark yellow to gold with three dark bands on its abdomen.



### State Soil

The state soil is Monongahela silt loam, adopted by concurrent resolution in 1997, making West Virginia the twelfth state to have an official state soil.



### State Tree

The sugar maple, *Acer Saccharum*, was made West Virginia's official tree by House Concurrent Resolution No. 12, adopted by the Legislature on March 7, 1949, authorizing a vote by pupils of public schools and civic organizations. It produces an excellent wood for future use as well as maple syrup. A single tree can be 70 to 120 feet high and produce two to three pounds of sugar when "sugared off," has a five-lobed leaf, and produces a small wing-shaped pod.

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## Major Points of Interest

- **Harpers Ferry** - In addition to its fabulous scenery, Harpers Ferry was the site of the first successful application of interchangeable manufacture, the arrival of the first successful American railroad, John Brown's attack on slavery, the largest surrender of Federal troops during the Civil War, and the education of former slaves in one of the earliest integrated schools in the United States.
- **New River Gorge National River** - Encompassing over 70,000 acres of land along the New River, this national park protects 53 miles of free-flowing water. The gorge, carved by the world's second-oldest river, has been dubbed the "Grand Canyon of the East." A new eco-friendly visitor center opened near Sandstone in 2003.
- **The Greenbrier Resort** - The Greenbrier is a AAA Five-Diamond, award-winning resort nestled on 6,500 acres in the scenic Allegheny Mountains in White Sulphur Springs. This world-renowned getaway offers more than 50 activities, including three 18-hole championship golf courses, a golf academy, a Land Rover driving school, a gallery of fine shops and a host of traditional amenities that have distinguished the resort for more than 200 years. In 2003, readers of *Conde Nast Traveler* magazine voted the Greenbrier one of the "Best of the Best" golf resorts in the world and the number two spa resort in North America.
- **Berkeley Springs** - Long before the first Europeans discovered its warm waters, this region was already a famous health spa attracting Native Americans from Canada to the Carolinas. George Washington even slept here. Today, Berkeley Springs offers state-of-the-art spas, unique shops, and local arts.
- **West Virginia Scenic Railroads** – West Virginia features more than 80 railroad attractions, including the world-famous Cass Scenic Railroad State Park and the Mountain State Mystery Train and New River Gorge excursions. There's also diesel favorites like the Potomac Eagle excursions, on which passengers enjoy a 90% chance of seeing a bald eagle. There's also the recently expanded Durbin & Greenbrier Valley Railroad. The state is steeped in railroad traditions and there are a number of historic facilities that mark this culture.
- **Stonewall Resort** – Opened in 2002, Stonewall Resort is the latest development in state park facilities. The resort sits along the shore of the state's second-largest impoundment, Stonewall Jackson Lake, and features an Arnold Palmer-designed championship golf course, lodge, deluxe cottages, houseboat rentals, and a spa.
- **Tamarack** - Tamarack is the nation's first and only statewide collection of handmade craft, art, and cuisine showcasing "The Best of West Virginia" from hand-carved furniture to glass, from pottery to Appalachian quilts and more. Tamarack offers regional specialty foods and products, as well as performances, craft demonstrations, shopping, theater, art gallery and a food court managed by The Greenbrier.
- **Oglebay Resort and the Winter Festival of Lights** - Oglebay is a 1,650-acre resort with abundant recreational activities, deluxe accommodations, a zoo, gardens and shops nestled in the hills surrounding Wheeling. The resort features three golf courses and is home to America's largest light show, the Winter Festival of Lights. More than one million visitors and 3,000 tour buses visit the park and city each year to experience the show.
- **The West Virginia State Park System** - The 49 parks, forests, and wildlife management areas comprise more than 180,000 acres set aside to protect regions of natural wonder, showcase scenic beauty, and preserve sites of historical significance. For years, the park system has been considered among the finest in the nation.
- **National Radio Astronomy Observatory at Green Bank** - Home of the Green Bank Telescope, the world's largest moveable radio telescope. Here researchers study the universe through natural radio emissions. A new \$7.2 million education center opened in 2003, providing visitors and school children additional opportunities to learn about this exciting field of science.

*(Information on any of the points of interest is available by calling the West Virginia Division of Tourism toll-free at 1-800-CALL WVA or connecting to their Web site at <[www.callwva.com](http://www.callwva.com)>.)*



## State Profile

# Famous West Virginians

Here is a sampling of the many famous West Virginians:

**Randy Barnes** (1966- ) perhaps the world's greatest shot-putter. He holds both the outdoor and indoor world records and was a gold medalist in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. He was born in Charleston, Kanawha County.

**Pearl Buck** (1892-1973), American novelist, born in Hillsboro, Pocahontas County. Many of her more than 85 books sympathetically portray China and its people. She was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature and the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

**Robert Carlyle Byrd** (1917- ) was elected in 2000 to an eighth consecutive term in the U. S. Senate. He was the majority leader of the Senate from 1977 to 1981 and from 1987 to 1989. Byrd is from Sophia, Raleigh County.

**Bob Denver** (1935- ), who played "Gilligan" on the TV series *Gilligan's Island* and "Maynard G. Krebs" on the TV series *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, lives near Princeton, Mercer County. His wife Dreama is from West Virginia.

**Homer H. Hickam, Jr.** (1943- ) is the author of *Rocket Boys: A Memoir*, the story of his life in the little town of Coalwood, McDowell County, that inspired the number one bestseller and award-winning movie *October Sky*.

**Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson** (1824-1863) was one of the leading generals of the Confederacy during the Civil War and is considered among the most skillful tacticians in military history. He was born in Clarksburg, (then in Virginia).

**Anna Jarvis** (1864-1948) considered the founder of Mother's Day. Following the death of her own mother in 1905, she began campaigning to have one day a year set aside to honor mothers. In 1914 President Wilson signed a proclamation declaring Mother's Day a holiday. She was born near Grafton, Taylor County.

**Don Jesse Knotts** (1924- ), television and movie actor, was born in Morgantown (Monongalia County) to a farm family he described as "dirt poor." He attended West Virginia University where he majored in speech, hoping to become a teacher. Knotts played the role of "Barney Fife" on the *Andy Griffith Show*.

**Captain Jon A. McBride** (1943- ) became an astronaut in August 1979 and piloted the Challenger when it was launched on October 5, 1984. He was a Republican candidate for Governor of West Virginia in 1996. McBride was born in Charleston, Kanawha County.

**Kathy Mattea** (1959- ), country music star, was born in South Charleston and grew up in Cross Lanes (Kanawha County).

**John Forbes Nash Jr.** (1928- ), described as a mathematical genius who essentially lost 30 years of his life to paranoid schizophrenia and who re-emerged into public glory (once the disease was in remission) to receive the 1994 Nobel Prize in Economics for a brilliant doctoral dissertation begun in 1950 (from *A Beautiful Mind*, a biography of Nash by Sylvia Nasar that inspired a movie of the same name). Nash was born and reared in Bluefield, Mercer County.

**Mary Lou Retton** (1968- ), gymnast who won four medals in the 1984 Summer Olympics, including the gold in the all-around gymnastics competition. She is from Fairmont, Marion County.

**Jerome Alan "Jerry" West** (1938- ) was selected in 1996 as one of the 50 greatest NBA basketball players. He was a professional basketball star for the Los Angeles Lakers. He was born in Cabin Creek, Kanawha County.

**Charles Elwood "Chuck" Yeager** (1923- ) became the first person to fly faster than the speed of sound in October 1947 and the first person to fly more than twice the speed of sound in December 1953. Yeager was born at Myra in Lincoln County.

For a more extensive list of famous West Virginians visit Jeff Miller's Famous West Virginians page at <http://members.aol.com/jeff560/westvirginia.html> >.